

Don't limit my potential

The following is an essay I wrote for a language paper about why I feel censoring the Internet is wrong.

To some people, the Internet does not mean much to them. To others however, the Internet is all that they know. Whether it's a teenager communicating with friends on MySpace.com, or a full time employee working on updating the company's website, the Internet makes both of those possible. But like everything else in the world, a positive thing also has a negative side. Since the creation of the Internet, there has been content published that are not appropriate for minors to view. Some people claim that to solve this problem, the Internet must be censored. Although people think that censoring the Internet would solve the content problem, it would be unconstitutional and infringe upon web publishers first amendment rights. There are other ways of fixing the problem besides having a censor. It is sad to think that people choose to publish the unsuitable material that they do, but it is their right to do so. Censoring the Internet is a very big issue to debate because it's one that affects America's kids, but it doesn't have to.

First, here is some background information about how exactly the Internet came to be what it is today. The Internet has been around for almost 40 years. The very first recorded evidence of the Internet, was four military servers connected to each other called APRANET that could transfer information back and fourth in 1969. Over the years, the Internet has gone through some dramatic changes. It was in 1990 that HTTP (HyperText Transfer Protocol) was invented which standardized the way that Internet documents are sent and received to each computer. The APRANET Network lasted until 1994 where it was disbanded allowing 3,000,000 computers world wide to be connected to each other through the Internet to exchange information.

Many Internet users feel that if the Internet were to be censored, it would deny Internet Publishers everywhere the right to free speech. In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed into law the Communications Decency Act (CDA). That Act would allow the government the ability to regulate and censor speech written and published on the internet. Right after the CDA was passed in 1996, organizations such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), and the Citizens Internet Empowerment Coalition (CIEC) started to form. These groups "fought" for the Internet, and the CIEC group challenged the CDA because "the Internet is a unique communications medium, different from traditional broadcast mass media which deserves broad First Amendment protections". The CIEC, along with computer companies such as Microsoft and America Online took the CDA to a federal court. On June 12, 1996, a court in Philadelphia composed of three judges ruled that the CDA was unconstitutional, and it abridged the rights of the First and Third Amendments. After "losing" their case in the three judge court, the Justice Department (representing the CDA) appealed, and the case was moved to the Supreme Court. Just over a year later, on June 26, 1997, the Supreme Court also ruled that the CDA violated the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of speech.

A lot of people who are complaining that the Internet isn't censored, does not know that it is still being

regulated. Laws that already exist, that include defamation, child pornography, and copyright, are also applicable to the Internet just as they are to any other form of media. For instance, child pornography is illegal in almost every country including the United States. If a website containing child pornography is found on the internet, it is shutdown if at all possible by authorities of the appropriate country. An example of laws already in place and covering the Internet would be the case of Bently Ives. Ives, who was the President of Webb World at the time, was arrested for possession of child pornography which he accessed from the Internet. Ives case just goes to show that creating new laws for the Internet are plainly unnecessary. The reason is that federal, state, and local laws that are already in place, apply to Internet users.

The “opposition”, or those who do want the Internet to be censored, does have a really good point. The children and youth of America have access to a lot of material that are clearly unsuitable for them to see. Not only pornography, but there is material on the Internet that even explains how to build a bomb, or how to make homemade drugs. “The Internet threatens to give every child a free pass into the equivalent of every adult bookstore and every adult video store in the country”. The Internet truly does make it easy for kids to do about anything. However, there are ways of preventing that, without a full censorship of the Internet. The most obvious way, parents need to monitor their children when they are online. People argue that by saying it’s impossible to monitor them all the time. That’s true, but that is why there are materials such as password protection on computers (“Censoring”). Even better than just having a password on a computer, is having a program such as Net Nanny. Net Nanny allows parents the ability to “monitor, screen, and block access to anything residing on, or running in, out or through your PC, online and off”. These types of programs are nearly impossible to get around, and it allows parents to not have to worry as much when they know their children are online.

Censoring the Internet would completely be violating users and publishers alike the right to free speech. In fact, the Supreme Court even ruled it to be so. A censor is not needed. Instead, what is needed is for parents to be more aware of their child’s activities online, and to setup programs to monitor and block content when the parents are away. So in conclusion, even though there are some bad content on the Internet, there are still other alternatives to regulate and protect America’s children besides putting a censor on it.